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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the current status of available programs, research findings related to quality programs, and issues surrounding programs for 4-year-old children. The paper is intended as a resource for multiple audiences, including decision makers, legislators, regulatory administrators, advocates, parents, and all those whose tasks relate to programs for 4-year-olds. In addition, the paper is an initial attempt to study the major issues related to such programs. The research review briefly describes compensatory programs for disadvantaged children; cites conclusions of a comparison of four types of programs; describes some state and district-wide programs in Maryland, New York, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia; summarizes results of a national survey of educators' views about the expansion of early childhood education; and reports policy statements of the Educational Policies Commission and NAEYC regarding the expansion of programs. Existing programs for 4-year-olds in Maryland are described. The discussion of issues focuses on program quality, availability and accessibility, curriculum, training, parent role, regulations, the impact of early education on existing programs, and the dissemination and exchange of information among educators of 4-year-olds. Recommendations of the Maryland Committee for Children concerning program quality, availability and accessibility, and future research are provided along with citations of selected references. (RH)

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PROGRAMS FOR FOUR YEAR OLDS

A RESOURCE PAPER

Prepared by the Programs for Four Year Olds
Subcommittee of the Public Policy Committee

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INTRODUCTION

In light of nationwide attention to programs for four-year-old children, continued interest based on research from compensatory programs, and changing demographics of American families, the Programs for Four Year Olds' Subcommittee of the Public Policy Committee of the Maryland Committee for Children was charged with looking into the status of and issues related to programs for four-year-old children.

The purpose of this paper is to provide information concerning the current status of available programs, research findings related to quality programs, and issues surrounding programs for four year olds. The paper is intended to serve as a resource for multiple audiences, including decision makers, legislators, regulatory administrators, advocates, parents, and all those whose tasks relate to programs for four year olds.

In addition to serving as a resource, this paper is intended as an initial attempt to study the major issues concerned with such programs. In reality, programs for four year olds cannot be studied in isolation. This resource paper is limited in its attempt to portray services for the whole child. The future directions of child care and education will be of major concern to all those involved in determining programs for four-year-old children.

The Programs for Four Year Olds' Subcommittee attempted to look at the concept of education for four year olds, and searched the literature for documentation of needs and outcomes. Some aspects of the literature are quite clear. Research on the value of programs for four year olds in improving self-concept, attitude, and motivation demonstrates that these enhancing effects take place only when there is a quality program that includes well-planned and appropriate provisions for training, staffing, monitoring, and parent involvement. Group size and teacher-child ratios are also important.

Most of the literature to date has focused on high quality programs, such as those which are university-based or which utilize a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach, rather than on representative programs. Therefore, the degree to which the effects of programs for four year olds can be generalized is limited. Whether other programs for four year olds could be as effective as those discussed in the research section of the paper is based on the program's commitment and ability to deliver those components necessary for a quality program.

RESEARCH REVIEW:

PROGRAMS FOR FOUR YEAR OLDS

During the past twenty years, numerous and varied programs have been available for four-year-old children. It is estimated that in 1980, 46.3% of all four year olds were in either government-subsidized programs for low-income families or in private programs supported by those willing and able to pay for them (Soderman, 1984).

Many demonstration programs which were studied in the 1960's were compensatory programs for disadvantaged children from low-income families. Those programs were the precursors of Head Start. The research literature available today primarily reflects the effects of those quality programs. The focus of research measured the outcomes of individual children through the use of achievement tests and I.Q. scores. School performance, academic ability, and achievement were the focus of subsequent evaluation.

The 1970's were marked by fiscal constraint and accountability, and evaluations shifted to cost accounting and management information. At the same time, due to the great numbers of women entering the work force, attention was drawn to day care services (Travers, 1982).

In this research review of programs for four year olds, information is presented in the following categories:

I. Compensatory Programs for Disadvantaged Children
II. Program and Curriculum
III. Some State and District-Wide Projects
IV. National Opinion Survey of Educators' Views
V. Policy Statements Regarding Expansion of Programs

I. COMPENSATORY PROGRAMS FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

It should first be noted that research dealing specifically with comparisons of children in the general population who attended preschools for four year olds, with those who did not, is scarce. The primary focus of the past twenty years has been on the comparison of economically disadvantaged children who participated in compensatory preschool programs with those economically disadvantaged children who did not.

Most children are born within a similar range of intelligence. Research has found that intelligence levels of young children are strongly influenced by environmental factors (Sameroff, 1976). Children in families of low socioeconomic groups generally fall 10 to 20 points in I.Q. test scores during the early years of life.

I.Q. scores of four-year-old children are reduced by such factors as lack of family support, stressful life events, the lack of time that the mother spends spontaneously smiling, vocalizing, and touching the infant, the degree of mental illness in the family, and other factors including occupation, maternal education, and minority status (Sameroff, 1976). No single factor limits early intellectual development, but the compilation of risk factors increases the probability that development would be compromised.

This information is important, as it emphasizes the need for quality early childhood programs. Since the I.Q. levels of most children from low socioeconomic groups fall during the early years, effective programs for young children could maintain the intellectual levels of their participants. When children have an increase in I.Q. levels, and perform at or near the level of most of their peers, the results of early educational intervention are, of course, even more pronounced (Sameroff, 1976).

It should be noted that research has been tested almost exclusively on high quality programs associated with universities and able to utilize many of their services. Little research has been done on marketplace quality services.

The research of the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, Abecedarian Projects, Head Start, and Ypsilanti Perry Preschool Project will be presented in this section.

Consortium for Longitudinal Studies

Most widely accepted in terms of the scope of the project and the numbers of children involved, is the work of the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, headed by Irving Lazar from Cornell University. This study, reported in 1980, was a collaborative analysis of twelve separate quality early childhood programs which were initiated in the 1960's for children from low-income families. The programs were designed, implemented, and supervised by some of the best early childhood professionals in the United States and followed rigorous designs and controls selected before the programs began.

The programs were diverse and included designs which represented center-based as well as home-based models; part-day, part-year, as well as individual instruction only (without participation in a program). The analysis conducted by the Consortium addressed only the common elements among those individual studies. The following results were obtained:

1. Assignment to Special Education: Early education programs significantly reduced the number of children assigned to special education classes; 28.6% were assigned to special education from the control groups, while 13.8% were assigned from the treatment groups.

2. Retention In Grade: The median rate of grade retention was 25.4% in the treatment groups, compared to 30.5% in the control groups. Program children were significantly less likely to experience grade retention than control counterparts, based on results pooled across projects.

3. Achievement Test Scores: The Consortium reported that early education significantly increased children's scores on fourth grade mathematics achievement tests, with a suggested trend toward increased scores on fourth grade reading tests.

4. Intelligence Test Scores: Low-income children who attended preschool surpassed their control counterparts on the Stanford-Binet I.Q. test for up to three years after the preschool program ended.

5. Attitudes and Values: Children who attended preschool were more likely than control group children to give achievement-related reasons for being proud of themselves. The mothers of the children who attended preschool had higher vocational aspirations for their children than did mothers of children who did not attend programs. Although these variables have been found to be highly correlated, a cause-effect relationship cannot be assumed.

In conclusion, the data showed that if early childhood programs are of high quality, children do benefit from them in a number of ways (Lazar et al., 1980).

Abecedarian Project

Craig Ramey, at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, conducted a compensatory program for preschoolers in which four different levels of treatment were utilized. A comparison of each treatment group showed that preschool children assigned to the group that included a quality preschool program, in conjunction with a parent education component, made the most significant gains on standardized intelligence test scores compared with the children in the other three groups.

Head Start

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services began publishing a series of reports based on an extensive search of research on the effects of Head Start on the children and families it has served (Harrel, 1983). Project Head Start is a federally-funded compensatory program for children from low-income families. Using a system of meta-analysis (the synthesis of findings from studies which differ in design and methodology), the results thus far indicate that Head Start does enhance the cognitive development of children. Head Start programs are generally better funded than child day care programs and require high staff/child ratios. The ratio of one adult to five four-year-old children is not unusual. The most significant findings are that:

1. children made immediate gains in basic cognitive competency and school readiness and achievement;

2. gains in basic cognitive competency and school readiness and achievement continued during the first three years after Head Start;

3. the Head Start program has become more effective than in the past in promoting cognitive development. Gains made by children who attended Head Start after 1970 are considerably larger than those made by children in the program between 1965 and 1969;

4. the most disadvantaged children, those from single parent families and/or families in which the mother had a tenth-grade education or less, gained the most from their Head Start participation (Harrell, 1983); and

5. the rate of special education placement was 14% for former preschool participants and 29% for children in the control group (Collins, 1984).

Ypsilanti Perry Preschool Project:

The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation conducted a longitudinal study of 123 poor black children from Ypsilanti, Michigan. In summary, the study showed that participation in high quality preschool pays off in better academic performance, lower rates of crime and delinquency, and better earnings prospects. Specific findings are listed below.

1. Employment: At age 19, 50% of the preschool group were employed, while only 32% of the non-preschool group were employed.

2. Special Education Assignment: 15% of the preschool groups were classified as mentally retarded, compared to 35% of the non-preschool group.

3. Functional Competence: At age 19, 61% of the preschool group scored average or above average on a test of functional competence. This coupared to 38% of the non-preschool group.

4. Teenage Pregnancy: The rate for women in the preschool group was 64 pregnancies per 100 women, compared to 117 per 100 women in the non-preschool group.

5. High School Graduates: 67% of the preschool group graduated from high school, compared to 49% of the non-preschool group.

The study analyzed the cost benefits of the preschool program and found that the return was $3,500 for each $1,000 spent for two years of preschool and $7,000 for each $1,000 spent for one year of preschool. David Weikart, president of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, emphasizes that such programs will not work unless they are of sufficient quality.

II. PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM

While research on program and curriculum showed that no single approach was superior on all measures, in a number of studies there were large differences in the effectiveness of a given model at different sites (National Follow-Through). In a comparative analysis of curriculum models, Rochelle Mayer (1971) compared four types of programs. She found that, other than the inclusion of an emphasis on language, curriculum components are less crucial to a program's effectiveness than the planning component. She concluded that systematic program planning is the crucial variable.

Importance of the Opportunity for Play in Programs for Four Year Olds

The importance of the opportunity for play for young children has been well-documented (Feitelson & Ross, Sutton-Smith, Garvey, Peller, Fein, Smilansky). Studies have shown that children who engage in play can benefit in their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development (Chance, 1979). Play is thought to be a facilitator of convergent and divergent thinking (Peller & Ross) and gives children permission to exercise newly discovered skills. Four-year-old children who engage in sociodramatic play develop greater language competencies and creativity than children who do not. It is generally believed that play is one of the primary ways by which young children learn.

Importance of Parent Involvement

The Abecedarian Project at Chapel Hill pointed to the critical importance of the inclusion of a strong parent education component in the program. This is supported by the Huron Institute's research review of programs for preschoolers, which concluded that an essential program component was a planned program that included parent involvement.

Importance of Group Size

The National Day Care Study was a large-scale study of marketplace day care designed to form federal regulatory policy (Ruopp et. al., 1979). The study found that children cooperated and engaged in creative intellectual activities more frequently when they were in small groups than when they were in large groups. The study also found that caregivers with training specifically related to young children (i.e., training in child development or early childhood education) provided more social and intellectual stimulation than those without such training.

The Voices for Children Project, conducted by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, lists six characteristics as the basis for high quality educational programs.

1. Programs must be well managed and monitored.

2. Parents become partners with teachers in educating the child.

3. Competent, trained, and committed teachers or caregivers plan and work together in teams to provide mutual support and individual attention to children.

4. Programs must be organized around a specific curriculum or set of principles for learning.

5. Teachers or caregivers must be trained in the curriculum through ongoing in-service training.

6. The program is regularly assessed to ensure that goals for high quality are being met.

III. SOME STATE AND DISTRICT-WIDE PROGRAMS

In Robinson's 1981 state-by-state analysis of educational opportunities for young children in America, it was found that in forty-four states, kindergarten was provided for all students who requested it. In the remaining six states, students were selected by lottery to attend available programs. When examining programs for children from birth to age four, fewer than 30% of the states offered educational opportunities to children in this age group. In no state were all children of this age group offered opportunities for learning. In eleven states, programs were offered only for exceptional children. In an additional fifteen states, including Maryland, there have been special attempts to offer services. In Maryland, four year olds may be served through the Extended Elementary Education Program or through Chapter I and migrant classifications if they meet certain criteria such as requirements for special education.

Maryland

Beginning in the 1980's, the Early Childhood Education Branch of the Maryland State Department of Education, working in cooperation with Irving Lazar and Richard Darlington from the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, carried out studies to determine the effectiveness of the ESEA Title III prekindergarten programs and the Extended Elementary Education Program. These evaluations focused on two areas: the effects of participation in a four-year-old program on school progress in later grades and the effects of participation in the Extended Elementary Education Program on student achievement, kindergarten through grade 3.

Results indicate that prekindergarten participation had a positive and significant effect on later school progress. Participation in the ESEA Title III prekindergarten programs reduced children's unsatisfactory school progress at grades five, six, or seven by 16.4%. At grade three, students with former EEEP prekindergarten experiences scored an average four months ahead of their non-prekindergarten peers on the reading, math, and language subtests of the California Achievement Test. At each level, kindergarten through third grade, an average 9% more children with EEEP prekindergarten experiences than without, had mid-year reading levels that were at or above grade level.

Study results document that early childhood education programs in Maryland are contributing to improved school performance. On the one hand, they are insulating children against discontinuous progress, as defined by grade level failure or assignment to self contained special education classes. On the other hand, they are fostering academic achievement as it is reflected in both students' daily classroom performances and their performance on standardized tests.

New York

In 1975, a five year longitudinal study was designed to determine whether organized preschool education experiences could help overcome potential educational deficits in the backgrounds of disadvantaged children. The program annually served 5,000 disadvantaged four year olds and 1,500 three year olds.

The results showed that prekindergarten programs do have a measurable positive effect upon children's knowledge of verbal concepts and that this effect is maintained after the children leave the program. Results showed further that prekindergarten experience had a measurable positive effect on these children's cognitive and non-cognitive development, at least through the time they completed third grade. With appropriate follow-up in the primary grades, certain effects, particularly those in the quantitative domain, continued. In terms of programmatic aspects, the results showed dramatically that parents' involvement had a marked positive effect on children's cognitive development.

The report concluded that the prekindergarten program had lasting positive effects on the children who attended. It was felt that the most important result was that disadvantaged children who attended prekindergarten programs were more likely to make normal progress through the primary grades than those who did not.

South Carolina

As of 1984, two out of five children from low-income families are served by some publicly-funded program such as Head Start, child development programs or child development centers. Approximately half of the four year olds from these families are still unserved by any publicly-supported program. In a study comparing children enrolled in preschool programs with those who did not attend such programs, results showed that good early childhood programs gave children better chances of succeeding in school and later avoiding delinquency. The results of this comparative study also showed that those who attended preschool programs were better prepared to enter school and were more successful in first grade, than those who did not. State-funded child development centers, available for four year olds and sponsored by the Department of Education, have been credited with improving children's readiness for first grade (Schweinhart & Barnett, 1984).

District of Columbia

In 1968, seventy-five portable prekindergarten classrooms were opened in Washington, D.C. The curriculum was based on the importance of children's sensory, exploratory, and investigative experiences and on learning through play. While there was no systematic evaluation of the program's effectiveness, teachers in the program believed that early education served to widen the range of abilities of kindergarten children. This was based on comparisons of kindergarten children who had prekindergarten experience and children who were entering a school setting for the first time (Blackmon, 1973).

IV. A NATIONAL OPINION SURVEY OF EDUCATORS' VIEWS

In a study to assess the perspectives of professional educators on questions related to the expansion of early childhood education, Sponseller and Fink (1980) focused on two major questions: (1) What attitudes concerning early childhood education do early childhood educators hold and what policies do they support?, and (2) Are there regional or other subgroup differences in the types and levels of support? For the purpose of their study, early childhood education was defined as "a program for children below kindergarten age which is conducted primarily outside the home."

The authors felt that one policy area which should receive special attention was that of young children's rights to early education. The results of the 1,121 respondents can be summarized as follows: Respondents believed that there is a science to child development which may guide educational programs and that these programs are beneficial to children. They also believed that it would be desirable for all children to attend free programs but that this attendance should be subject to the wishes of parents. Further, they denied claims that a child's attendance in programs outside the home would be harmful to the child, parents, or institution of the family. The respondents' views reflected strong commitment to parents' rights and to the family as the focus of childrearing. They opposed compulsory out-of-home programs even if they were carefully designed and professionally staffed, and even if parents could decide on the type of programs to be attended. The authors summarized that professional educators who responded to the survey believe in the positive value of early childhood programs outside the home. They supported free and voluntary programs which allow parental choice.

V. POLICY STATEMENTS REGARDING EXPANSION OF PROGRAMS

Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association

In May 1966, the Educational Policies Commission issued a statement regarding the universal opportunity for early childhood education. In summary, the NEA took the position that the opportunity for compensatory education should begin at age four for children who were economically and/or socially deprived, and who may be seriously impeded in their progress through public school. The NEA recognized the importance of home and family as the basic unit in our society and the primary responsibility of parents for the development of their children. The statement further read, "All children should have the opportunity to go to school at public expense beginning at age four." The objectives of instruction in the early years should focus on four major areas of development: intellectual, emotional, social, and physical. Early education can enlarge the child's span of experience and promote children's sense of security and self respect. The statement referred to the idea of a two year program for fours and fives and recommended that the federal government provide general support for such schooling.

National Association for the Education of Young Children

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has a membership of over 43,000 early childhood caregivers and educators. In an effort to improve quality in group programs for children, NAEYC has recently developed an accreditation program through their National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. Formal operations will begin in early 1985. Focus of the Association for the past several years has been on what constitutes "quality care and education" for young children. Besides the accreditation program, NAEYC has developed a Nomenclature Document which includes a four-level description of early childhood personnel. At the present time, NAEYC is forming a commission to study issues related to the education and care of four-and five-year-old children. The NAEYC encourages nationwide use of its accreditation document.

EXISTING PROGRAMS

FOR FOUR YEAR OLDS IN MARYLAND

Maryland has many programs for four year olds which provide various types of child care services and educational opportunities. An estimated 50% of the state's 58,743 four year olds currently participate in these programs.

In Maryland, programs for four year olds are regulated by three different agencies: The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Department of Human Resources, and the Maryland State Department of Education. Each agency is responsible for the regulation of certain types of programs, indicated on the accompanying charts.

The focus of these programs may differ. Family day care programs provide care for the child in a home setting. Group day care centers primarily provide child care for up to 12 hours a day in a center. Nursery school programs primarily offer half day programs. Head Start and some MSDE-sponsored programs offer compensatory educational programs for children of low-income families. The MSDE's Extended Elementary Education Program provides services to four year olds in ten local educational agencies whose schools meet specific eligibility criteria. Special education programs focus on early intervention to prevent or limit the debilitating effects of handicapping conditions.

Programs regulated by each of the three departments require different qualifications for their teachers and child care providers. Family day care, regulated by the Maryland State Department of Human Resources, requires that a provider be age 18 or older; have neither a verifiable history of child mistreatment, nor be currently be under investigation for suspected child abuse or neglect; be in physical or mental health adequate to provide care; have satisfactory character references; and have no criminal record or charges that indicate behavior harmful to children.

Group day care programs, serving children primarily between the ages of 2 and 6, are regulated by the Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Required qualifications for program directors depend upon the number of children for whom the center is licensed. For all programs, the director must be at least 21 years old; have completed at least 64 classroom hours in early childhood curriculum and child development, specifically directed to the needs of children ages 2 to 6; demonstrate continued training; or hold a valid Child Development Associate (CDA) credential from the CDA National Credentialing Program.

In programs with 5 - 20 children, the director must have graduated from high school or hold an equivalent certificate, and have had one year of supervised experience working with a group of children in a licensed early childhood program.

In programs with 21 - 40 children, the director must have had a minimum of two years college credit and have had two years of supervised experience working with a group of children in a licensed early childhood program.

In programs with 40 or more children, the director must have graduated from a four-year college and have had two years of supervised experience working with a group of children in a licensed early childhood program. In Baltimore City, the director must have demonstrated the ability to work with parents and other adults in the community.

Senior staff members in charge of single groups, working under the supervision of a director, must be at least 21 years old; have graduated from high school or have obtained an approved certificate of high school equivalence or have successfully completed courses for credit in an accredited institution of higher learning; have completed at least 64 classroom hours in early childhood curriculum and child development, which are specifically directed to the needs of children, 2 to 6 years old; have had one-year experience under supervision working with a group of children in a licensed early childhood program or have successfully completed one year of study in an accredited institution of higher learning; and demonstrate continued training or hold a valid CDA credential from the CDA National Credentialing Program.

Non-public nursery schools and kindergartens are regulated by the Maryland State Department of Education. Program directors are required to have a B.A. degree and as a part of it, or in addition to it, 12 semester hours in early childhood education, including courses in human growth and development and methods of teaching. Teachers must hold the same qualifications as directors.

Nursery and kindergarten programs in public schools are regulated by the Maryland State Department of Education. Teachers in these programs must have a standard professional teacher's certificate. Qualifications for this certificate include a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, not less than 80 semester hours in specific academic courses, at least 26 semester hours in a planned program of professional education in the field of early childhood education (including foundations of education, curriculum, and methods of teaching) which shall have been a combination of nursery or kindergarten teaching and teaching in grades 1,2, or 3 (two years of successful teaching experience at the early childhood level may be substituted).

Programs regulated by Baltimore City and by federal guidelines have slightly varying requirements.

	Center Based Day Care	Family Day Care	Non-Public Nursery Schools
Regulated By:	DHMH	DHR	Dept. of Education (church sponsored programs may choose to be exempted)
Sponsored By:	Private; religious; public agency	Caregiver as a private business	Private; religious
Status:	Not-for-profit; proprietary; public	Proprietary	Not-for-profit; proprietary
Staff:	Senior staff, aides	Caregiver	Teachers, assistant teachers
Adult-Child Ratios:	Maximum 1:10	Maximum 1:6 (plus caregivers' own children over two)	Recommended 1:15
Program Length:	Usual: 6AM-6PM 5 days/week/ year round	Very flexible	Minimum: 2 1/2 hours Maximum: 5 hours 105 days/week Usually 9-10 month program
Who Pays:	Parents; federal, state, or local govt. purchase of care for income eligible families; support from private sources	Parents; federal, state, or local govt. purchase of care for income eligible families	Parents; support from private sources

	MSDE Sponsored Early Childhood Education	MSDE Sponsored Special Education	Head Start: Centers	Head Start: Home Based
Regulated By:	MSDE; local education agencies	MSDE; local education agencies	Federal guidelines; MSDE or DHMH	
Sponsored By:	MSDE; local education agencies	public; private; religious	Public agencies; private non-profit; local education agencies	
Status:	Public	Not-for-profit; proprietary; public	Public	
Staff:	Teachers; aides; co-ordinating teachers	Specialists	Teachers; senior staff; aides	Home visitor
Adult-Child Ratios:	Recommended 1:15 Maximum 2:18 - 22	Vary	1:8	1:1
Program Length:	1/2 day 5 days/week	Varies	1/2 day/some full day Usual: 9AM - 3PM; Maximum: 5 days/week Usually 10 month program; some full year	Minimum: 1 hr. 1 day/week 10 month program
Who Pays:	Federal, state, and local education agencies; program must meet federal guidelines to be eligible for Chapter I funding	Federal, state, and local education agencies; support from private sources; some parents pay for special education services	Federal, state, and local support	

ISSUES SURROUNDING PROGRAMS FOR FOUR YEAR OLDS

Increased interest in establishing statewide availability of educational services for four-year-old children has triggered the identification of several issues requiring attention and careful consideration by parents and those who plan, conduct, and regulate programs, as well as the community at large. These issues range from availability of services to the role of parents in the implementation of programs. The solutions to the problems posed by these issues are not without controversy. However, advocates are in agreement that programs for four-year-old children should meet the highest quality standards and should promote development of the total child.

Professionals, paraprofessionals, and parents have identified several major issues relative to the provision of educational services for four-year-old children. The issues discussed in this section include some of those gleaned from the professional literature and experiences of child care workers and advocates. The reader is cautioned that this discussion is not inclusive of all the issues and questions related to this topic, but highlights some of the critical areas worthy of study by those concerned with the education of four-year-old children.

I. QUALITY

Because all of the research concludes that quality is essential if a program is to play a positive role in the growth and development of young children, any compilation of issues surrounding such programs must consider quality. Research suggests that the quality of a program depends to a large extent on at least the following:

1. staff prepared and qualified in appropriate areas;
2. strong leadership;
3. clear goals;
4. an orderly atmosphere;
5. efficient use of time;
6. high levels of parent participation;
7. a favorable adult-child ratio;
8. ongoing staff training that provides strategies for program implementation;
9. program planning; and
10. curriculum which accomodates varying abilities.

We must answer such questions as:

1. What constitutes a quality program?
2. Who should assume the responsibility for ensuring the quality of four-year-old programs?
3. Will adequate staff training assure quality?

II. AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Availability and accessibility constitute two categories of issues concerning the existence of programs for four year olds and must be viewed in the context of existing programs.

Availability, in this context, means the condition of having programs for four year olds. The related issues are: Do they exist? Are they in sufficient quantity and variety? Accessibility means the condition of being easily obtainable. The related issues are: Can the existing program be used? Do location, cost, eligibility, transportation, physical layout, and/or hours of operation prevent or hinder use by certain individuals? Parents are often thwarted by problems concerning either availability or accessibility, and sometimes both, in their search for programs for four year olds. For example, a program may exist, but it may be full, too far away, or cost too much. For some, no program exists in their community. For others, no existing program is suited to their needs in terms of either quality or types of services.

Sponsorship is an issue related to availability. Should programs be provided by the non-profit sector, the profit-making sector, the public sector, the school, or the human service agencies? Such variety in sponsorship also addresses the issue of diversity. Diversity of sponsorship is a way of meeting the various needs of parents and children. On the other hand, diverse sponsorship raises the issue of ability to provide quality child care. How does one judge whether a sponsor is able to provide a good program? How does one ensure that a sponsor provides it and that a parent recognizes it?

Funding is another issue in the provision of programs for four year olds. Should there be sliding fee scales? Should the scales range from 0-100% of the real and fair cost? Should all levels of government provide funds? Should funds come from the private sector?

III. CURRICULUM

The current attention to four year olds brings with it a variety of perspectives among those who deliver services to children. These perspectives may vary not so much in ultimate goals as in the strategies utilized to achieve those goals.

Curriculum, the planned sequence of learning experiences designed for learners, continues to be of major concern. A major focus is the debate between proponents of highly structured programs and the advocates of more flexible approaches to learning. Inherent in this issue is how to ensure a learning process based on child growth and development, which includes the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical areas of development.

While all educators could agree that, at the least, the curriculum involves a sequence of experiences which serve as a guide for the teacher, there are several views on how this sequence is determined and implemented.

One view holds that sequential learning is based on the teaching of a specified content. It assigns children to a series of lessons designed to help them acquire skills in a systematic manner. This approach assumes that curriculum for young children is limited, definable, and controlled by educators. It exhibits a tendency to emphasize traditional subject matter and cognitive skills which can be measured.

Another view looks at the learning process as based on knowledge about the growth and development of young children. This approach assumes that curriculum for young children has unlimited possibilities and is structured only by children's interest, readiness, and ability. That which children learn often falls into areas that are not readily measurable.

Ultimately, curriculum involves three aspects: 1) the provision of learning experiences appropriate for each child's level of development; 2) the coordination of the child's education by the home and service provider; and 3) the bridging of the child's education from entrance three-year-old programs through programs for four year olds, kindergarten, first grade, and beyond.

The curriculum issue also requires a look at procedures for assessing the strengths, needs, and individual learning styles of children, program assessment procedures, and curricular balance. Decisions are made continuously by many people about different aspects of programs for young children. The need for integration of these is a factor to be considered. While communities might determine which services are needed; while teachers might make decisions about materials, equipment, curriculum content, and teaching methods; and while administrators are concerned about training programs and safe, functional facilities; the program itself must be based on where the children are in terms of their growth and development. Appropriate assessment procedures will identify each child's strengths, needs, and learning styles. A curriculum which allows for the abovementioned information to be used in planning will ensure that the program is geared to the needs of the child.

IV. TRAINING

The issue of training staff in programs for four year olds demands the utmost attention, since the children's welfare and development while in a program depends primarily upon the care and attention the staff provides. The question most often asked is, what kind of training does an individual need in order to provide care and instruction to young children? A long-held popular belief had been that adults need no special training for leadership roles with young children, since much of children's time is spent "playing." This belief, however, has been disproved, because research has shown that the first five years of life are crucial to children's later growth and development in the areas of intelligence, personality, and physical and mental health, which develop largely through play. Adults need training in order to facilitate the sociodramatic play so crucial to the four-year-olds' growth and development.

Questions about what constitutes adequate training for staff in programs for young children are: Is it possible for effective training, which encompasses the study of child growth and development, curriculum and methodology, and health and nutrition, to begin in the early years of adolescence within the public school system? If a well-balanced training component were incorporated into public school systems, could a high school graduate be ready to work as an assistant in a program for four year olds?

An additional issue that needs to be considered is how much training should be required for teachers and supervisors in young children's programs? Is it a matter of a two-year associate's degree, a four-year bachelor's degree, a specific number of college level semester hours, a certificate like the Child Development Associate credential, or something else?

Directly related to the question of what constitutes adequate training, are the questions of salary and working conditions. Should salaries be determined by the nature of one's assignment in programs for young children? For example, should the kindergarten teacher in a school be paid more than a senior staff member in a day care program? When the question is resolved about what is adequate training, perhaps satisfactory answers concerning salaries can be found. Another question to be addressed is how to ensure that salaries for personnel in young children's programs are at a level which can compete with other fields that require special training? Should the federal and/or state government make funds available for staffing programs with well-trained persons?

As to working conditions, one issue that must be addressed is, if a facility houses a program for young children, can it also be a comfortable and desirable environment for adults? Do facilities provide sufficient space for accommodating children's needs, as well as those of adults? A related issue concerns the perception that child care programs are staffed by part time employees and/or employees who work ten-hour days.

V. ROLE OF PARENTS

It has long been known that parents are a child's first and foremost teachers. It is now clearly demonstrable that what is learned during the traditional preschool years (birth through age five) holds the key to life's successes. Therefore, a program for four year olds must view the role of parents as a democratic partnership with the child's teachers and program administrators.

While few would argue the need for parent involvement in programs, the focus of such involvement is viewed differently by many parents and educators. Therefore, the types of tasks parents take on for themselves, and/or are requested to perform by teachers and administrators, vary greatly across programs. The tasks might include:

1. Parents as Advisors/Decision Makers - In this role, parents are involved in planning for their children's education; parents know their children best and should be involved in this planning.

2. Parents as Participants in the Education of Their Children - In this role, parents work specifically with their children in the classroom and/or at home.

3. Parents as Volunteers - In this role, parents assist in the study of special interest areas; they share their creative talents; assist with small groups; read stories; work with individual children; and implement other goals of the program. Use of parents as volunteers is a program component that offers opportunities for the teacher to expand and enrich the total program.

4. Parents as Supporters - In this role, parents contribute through service to the program (e.g., clerical, custodial, tutorial, fundraising). They are frequently in the role of observers and bystanders and are not directly involved in activities which have a direct relationship to the education of their children.

5. Parents as Sharers of Knowledge - In this role, parents participate in adult education activities, often in conjunction with program personnel, for all to learn more about child growth and development.

Expressed need for partnership between home/program and parents/teachers suggests consideration for the interrelationship between the parent and teacher roles, the exploration of cooperation and communication, and the mutual respect for the two roles.

VI. REGULATIONS

Sensitive to the needs of young children for protection and nurturing, Maryland has been a national leader for many years in regulating programs for young children. There are those who believe, however, that regulations are unnecessary government intervention. Others feel that regulations are necessary for consumer protection. One must consider whether or not regulations establish standards which ensure that programs provide young children with a safe and nurturing environment, in accordance with sound principles of child growth and development.

There are several questions that need to be resolved. How much regulating is necessary to ensure a safe environment and sound educational practice? Would too many regulations discourage potential providers, thus further limiting the supply of programs? Would too few regulations provide minimal standards which could not only result in harm to the child, but could also be interpreted as "quality" because there is an assumption that regulation guarantees quality? What does constitute a quality program? By whom should regulations be enforced (e.g., one government agency or a private accrediting agency)? Should consideration be given to establishing one set of regulations applicable to all programs for young children?

VII. IMPACT ON EXISTING PROGAMS

What public schools do with and for young children affects all other programs for young children. Kindergarten, either full or half day, is now universally available but not compulsory in Maryland. Does its very existence alter the nature of first grade programs in the schools? In 1969, James L. Hymes raised many of the issues we are now confronting. He wrote about twin problems: no transition between kindergarten and first grade, and first grade curriculum imposed on the kindergarten level.

If public school education were to be universally available from age 4, would there be pressure to alter curriculum downward so that four year olds would be asked to master what had previously been the work of five year olds?

An increasing number of programs are offering full day kindergarten. If programs for four year olds were offered as half day programs, would the natural progression cause all kindergartens to become full school day programs? Public provision of programs for four year olds alters public awareness of the educational needs of four year olds. Currently, programs for four years olds are available in the public schools for some children who meet specific criteria. If early childhood education outside the home is valuable because all children, regardless of their family experience, could benefit from such programs, then a strong case could be made for universal availability of publicly-sponsored programs for four year olds. Would such action cause currently existing non-public programs to lose their traditional market? If so, would this increase the availability of half day programs for two and three year olds? Would families be likely to use such programs and would children benefit from them?

A discussion of issues related to the impact of programs for four year olds on existing programs would not be complete without identifying some of the economic issues surrounding the provision of programs for four year olds in the public schools.

It is understood that to offer programs for all four year olds would be expensive even if it would also be cost effective. Particularly if there is a downward pressure on curriculum, some have suggested that the public sector might choose to continue to finance one 1/2 day year and 12 full day years of education, thereby funding a half day program for four year olds, and a full day program for five through sixteen year olds. The cost would be equivalent to a half day kindergarten program and full day program for first through twelfth grades, but the curriculum might be moved downward so that high school would end after grade eleven instead grade twelve. In the alternative, the public sector might have to fund an additional year of schooling at a time when public school funding is a major issue.

Currently, special funding is available for some programs for four year olds. If these programs were to become universally available, would the special funding end? This is particularly important since without special funding there could very well be strong impetus for adult/child ratios in programs for four year olds to be commensurate with those for older children.

Issues surrounding the impact on existing programs, if programs for four year olds were to be universally available in the public schools, include among others, curriculum, coordination, funding, and child care.

Other major questions remain. How would the child care needs of full time working parents be met while still permitting the child to participate in a half day public school program for four year olds? Without provision for before-and after-school care, would half day programs be available only to those who could take advantage of such programs, thereby encouraging the establishment of a dual system?

In addition to the question of the intellectual impact of programs for four year olds considered in the Research section of this paper, is the question of the ability of four year olds whose parents work to adjust to two programs each day — for parents will have to make arrangements for the balance of the working day after a school program for four year olds ends. Are four year olds able to handle this many changes in place and, especially, people, without it interfering with their emotional, social, and intellectual development?

VIII. DISSEMINATION AND EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

Exchange of information among parents, providers, and regulators is often raised as an issue in the delivery of services to young children.

We have noted earlier in this section questions surrounding the importance of parents in the process of educating young children. The issue is so important that we believe it bears inclusion in this discussion as well. Many feel that parents as consumers must not only understand the needs of their own child and the needs of their family, but must also be informed of the range of choices available to them. How parents and current and potential service providers share information about descriptions of programs, ranges of alternatives, cost, other services, and expectations are some issues involving exchange of information.

Another issue surfaces once the choice is made as to how the child is to be cared for. Parents and teacher/caregivers face the need to exchange information about the child as they develop a partnership to meet the child's needs.

As children move from one institution to another, is there a need for the non-public or public nursery and child day care programs to exchange information? A closely related issue concerns the exchange of information about the child among those who care for him/her at any one time. For example, in any one day, a child may attend a half day or full day public or non-public school program and a day care program which cares for him/her during those non-school hours while the parent works. This demonstrates the need for communication between and among systems about the child.

Another issue frequently raised is the need for communication between and among systems about the systems themselves. Knowledge of the programs of other service delivery systems is thought to help a provider understand how his/her service relates to the others, as they attempt to meet the needs of the child and his/her family in the community.

Communication between regulators and providers is still another issue. It has been suggested as one way to address program quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF

THE MARYLAND COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN

The following recommendations must be viewed within the appropriate context. In developing programs for four year olds, we must consider the whole child. This paper addresses only two aspects of the child: education and care. We have grouped the recommendations into three sections: 1) quality, which includes parent involvement, curriculum, training, and the impact on children; 2) availability and accessibility, which include dissemination of information, funding, regulations, and impact on existing programs; and 3) research.

I. QUALITY

Research on the values of programs for four year olds in improving self-concept, attitude, and motivation demonstrates that these enhancing effects take place only when there is a quality program with well planned and appropriate provisions for training, staffing, monitoring, and parent involvement based on knowledge of child growth and development.

Group size and teacher-child ratios are also important. Whether other programs for four year olds could be as effective as those discussed in the research section of the paper is predicated completely upon the program's commitment to quality and its ability to deliver those components necessary for a quality program including:

1. a high level of parent participation;
2. a national position on what constitutes quality preschool education;
3. a staff-child ratio in programs for four year olds of no more than 1:10, with a group size of no more than 20;
4. uniform, minimum standards to ensure that staff is prepared and qualified in appropriate areas;
5. appropriate staff training, both pre-service and in-service; and
6. a well-planned curriculum which reflects theories of child development and accommodates varying abilities.

Role of Parents

Results of research studies indicate that children have an added advantage in school when their parents encourage and support schooling. Parent participation must be included as a necessary component of programs for four year olds. Each program must be developed to meet the unique needs of the particular school it is to serve. Consideration should be given to at least the following:

1. attitudes and values of parents;
2. attitudes of teachers/staff about parents;
3. a variety of ongoing procedures for guaranteeing communication with parents;
4. training opportunities;
5. volunteerism;
6. home reinforcement activities; and
7. discussion and understanding of program goals and expectations.

Curriculum

While there are no "required subjects" in programs for four-year-old children, there are certain curriculum principles that should be included in planning any program. A good program (Leeper):

1. provides experiences which are appropriate to the developmental level of the child;
2. provides many opportunities for social adjustment;
3. develops from the immediate environment of the child;
4. allows plenty of time and adequate opportunities for children to express themselves freely through many media;
5. allows a child to use his/her whole body and to develop wholesome attitudes toward it;
6. utilizes the experiences of children and attempts to meet their needs as three, four, and five year olds, and builds firmly for later experiences;
7. involves parents as well as children; and
8. develops alternative ways of meeting individual needs.

Staffing

Recommendations regarding the staffing of programs for four year olds include that:

1. the adult-child ratio in programs for four year olds should not exceed 1:10;

2. support staff is essential in dealing with the whole child. Appropriately trained staff must be available to address health and nutrition needs, to provide parent liaisons, and to meet special needs of the child;

3. because of the special needs of young children, funding and staffing should make it possible for teachers in half day programs to work with one class for that half day and then spend the other half day working with parents, developing, administering, and evaluating assessment tools, receiving specific training, and identifying and involving necessary special support services to meet the needs of individual children; and

4. consideration must be given to the issue of providing people who work with young children benefits and work environment comforts that will attract them to, and keep them in, the field.

Training

There is a close correlation between the quality of a program and the training of its staff. Currently, the existing diversity of regulatory agencies for programs for four year olds leads to great differences in the prerequisite qualifications for the staff employed by these programs. However, uniform quality can be ensured only by standardization of these qualifications. There should be uniform minimum standards for levels of responsibility in programs for four year olds. These standards can include both degree and competency based qualifications (e.g., the CDA Credential), as well as experiential prerequisites and should be acceptable to the State Departments of Education, Human Resources, and Health and Mental Hygiene. To ensure meeting the prerequisite requirements for hiring staff, programs for four year olds must include a screening process for applicants.

In addition, in-service training is essential if there is to be a quality program. The training program should be based on the needs of the program as well as the individual strengths and perfomance needs of each staff member, and coordinated with an ongoing supervision and assessment system of staff members by their supervisors.

A well balanced training program should be designed for incorporation into school systems. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has developed an accreditation system for early childhood centers and schools. They should be consulted to see if the system incorporates standards for staff training, as well as personnel salary levels.

The training program should be based on principles inherent in adult learning. These principles call for a learning situation in which those responsible for the training program establish a climate for learning, plan with staff how the program will be implemented, diagnose training needs of all staff, set training goals, design a training plan, conduct learning activities for all staff, refer staff to other resources when appropriate, and evaluate training outcomes.

The in-service training curriculum, as well as prerequisite requirements for hiring staff, should be based on program needs and sound early childhood education principles. The Child Development Associate competencies represent one of a number of programs which can be used.

Whatever system is used, however, the curriculum should include these topics (or skills as prerequisite qualifications): health and safety of children; knowledge of child growth and development; assessing the performance of young children; fostering development in the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and creative areas; and curricular approaches in early childhood education.

If teachers or staff have no prior experience with children below first grade, retraining must be required.

Impact on Children

In the best interests of the child, the family, and society, there must exist a wide range of choices from which the combination of services, programs, and supports which best meet the needs of the child and the family may be selected. When these choices are being constructed, primary consideration must be given to the possible impact on the child. It must be recognized that:

1. adjustment to several settings is usually developmentally inappropriate for young children;

2. program length must be established within limits which respect the developmental stage of the child; and

3. adjustment to multiple caregivers in the same or multiple settings during the course of the day may interfere with the emotional, social, and intellectual development of the child.

II. AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

In the sections above, we identified some issues surrounding quality of programs for young children. The following sections address these factors. If such programs are to be offered:

1. they should be made available to all four-year-old children in sufficient quantity and variety to meet the needs of all those whose families choose to have their children participate;

2. they should be available to all children, regardless of family income or handicapping condition; and

3. they should be accessible to all four-year-old children. Location, cost, space, eligibility, transportation, and hours of operation are some of the issues surrounding accessibility.

Funding

Funding must be varied. Most parents want to pay [illegible]s fair and/or affordable, whether they make that payment through [illegible]ditional public school taxes or directly. The issue of governmental and private funding revolves around citizen responsibility, overall societal good, and enlightened self interest. An effective case for public support has been made in the results of the research concerning long-term benefits to children, families, and society and in principles of equal opportunity.

Regulations

In Maryland, three regulatory agencies are involved in early childhood programs: Maryland State Departments of Education, Human Resources, and Health and Mental Hygiene. Maryland's history, as related to the enforcement of several sets of regulations by more than one agency, attests to the fragmentation that results: the absence of consistency of standards, individual interpretation by enforcement officers, and a generally confused public. If we accept that children are this nation's greatest resource, then they deserve as much protection and safeguarding as any of our natural resources.

1. There should be reasonable government regulations for the protection of children.

2. These regulations should be designed to help providers deliver services in the best interests of the child and to help parents

   monitor the quality of the programs which provide care to their children during part of the day.

3. There should be one set of regulations which would accommodate different kinds of programs including day care, schools, camps, and nursery programs.

4. One State agency should be designated and assigned responsibility to coordinate the regulation of all out-of-home day care programs.

5. There should be common definitions for all programs.

6. Regulations should address all facets of a program including the facility, curriculum, staffing, and administrative policies and procedures.

7. There should be a national position on what constitutes quality preschool education.

8. Regulations should always have a companion document of guidelines for the benefit of the enforcer, the provider, and the parent.

Dissemination of Information

Issues of communication among the parent, the child, the teacher, the service delivery system, and the regulator must be considered as we develop programs for four year olds. It is essential that:

1. parents be helped to understand the ranges of choices available to meet the needs of their own children and families;

2. information is shared among parents and current and potential service providers about programs, costs, and other issues;

3. parents and service providers share information about the child;

4. programs share information about the child as the child moves from one program to another;

5. programs share information about the child who is concurrently in more than one program (e.g., school and child care);

6. communication be developed among the systems so that each understands what the other does and how each meets the various needs of children and their families;

7. providers and regulators regularly communicate among themselves in order to increase their ability to deliver services which meet minimum requirements; and

8. regulators and parents regularly communicate as parties of the monitoring process essential to the maintenance of quality programs.

Impact on Existing Programs

If half day programs for four year olds were to be universally or increasingly available, there would clearly be implications regarding existing programs. If the "formal" education process were to be perceived as starting at age four, we believe it essential to:

1. resist any pressure to alter curriculum downward so that four year olds would be asked to master what had been the five-year-old curriculum;

2. make specific efforts to encourage the continued variety of program deliverers;

3. safeguard the continued survival of quality programs, since availability of programs for four year olds in the public schools would likely alter the market for traditional non-public delivery of services to four year olds;

4. consider the need to address the problems of full time working parents, if programs for four-year-old children were half day;

5. avoid the creation of a dual system in which children of parents who work and who, therefore, require full day care, would not be able to take advantage of publicly available half day programs;

6. explore in depth the effects of funding for public programs for four year olds on current funding for existing programs (e.g., the impact on programs whose current funding is based on specific eligibility criteria, and the impact on existing child care programs whose enrollment would be drawn from the same population served by publicly-funded programs for fours);

7. research the range of funding mechanisms and their implications; and

8. make maximum use of existing programs.

III. RESEARCH

The research trends of the 1980's are developing around the effects of day care on all infants and young children, not only on those from disadvantaged homes. Services have broadened as a result of the changing shifts in our society. Therefore, future research must take into account those societal changes, the demographic shifts in the numbers of young children, the changing compositions of families, increasing numbers of mothers in the labor force, the rise in the number of single parent families, and the feminization of poverty which captures so many mothers of young children.

There is need for research in many areas to address the questions listed below.

1. What are the benefits of programs for four year olds in terms of the whole child, not only of his intellect?

2. What are potential liabilities involved for children who participate in programs which maintain quality standards lower than those that exist in the programs used in existing research models?

3. Are these benefits and liabilities applicable to all children? Research indicates advantages for handicapped and disadvantaged children. Research should be applicable to the total population of four year olds.

4. What would be the impact on children and their families if programs for four year olds were half day, full day, or extended day?

5. Should program length be determined by the delivery system? Should nursery schools offer half day programs, public schools offer half day or school day programs, and day care centers offer up to twelve hour programs?

6. What criteria would determine child entry into half, full, or extended day programs? Should child developmental needs, parental needs, local availability, and/or cost be the determining factors?

7. What is the impact of program length on child development?

8. Do the benefits and liabilities differ among half, full, and extended day programs?

9. What is the impact of program length on curriculum?

10. What is the impact of program length for four-year-old children on programs for five year olds, and for three year olds? If four year olds attend full school-day programs, can kindergarten for five year olds realistically remain half day?

11. Should programs be 9-10 months or year round, and what criteria should determine program duration? Should planners consider factors such as handicapping conditions of the child, the value of uninterrupted services, and parents' work schedules? What is the impact of duration on child development? Should program duration be determined by the delivery system?

SUMMARY

This report represents the culmination of an effort by educators, administrators, parents, and advocates to assess programs for four-year-old children in Maryland. It considers the merit of such programs not only on the basis of documented research and apparent needs, but also on the basis of existing program capability to meet the diverse needs of children and families in Maryland.

The research review considered compensatory programs for disadvantaged children, program and curriculum, some state-and district-wide projects, a national opinion survey of educators' views, and policy statements regarding expansion of programs. The research identified such key factors in determining the quality of programs as parent involvement, staff-child ratios, training, and curriculum.

Existing programs for four year olds in Maryland were identified. These include center based care, family day care, non-public nursery schools, MSDE sponsored early childhood education and special education, and Head Start - both center and home based.

In both the Issue and the Recommendations sections, we considered the quality, the role of parents, curriculum, training, the impact on children, availability and accessibility, dissemination of information, funding, regulations, and the impact on existing programs. Inherent in the identification of these issues are questions which require careful consideration if the decisions were made to plan and deliver services for all four-year-old children in Maryland.

The resolution of these issues and questions will require close collaboration among agencies, advocates, parents, and the community. The challenge is to formulate a plan and direction for ensuring quality educational experiences for four-year-old children in Maryland.

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